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A

SERMON

Preached at the

FUNERAL

OF THE

Lady Compton,

August the 4*th*, 1687.

By *Lewis Atterbury*, L. L. D. and Rector of *Sywell*, in the County of *Northampton.*

LONDON,

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TO

WILLIAM WILLMER, *Esq;*

SIR,

I HERE *present* You *with a Sermon, which was first Preach'd (without any design of being made Publick) and is now Printed, wholly in compliance with* Your *desire.*

You, *who know how few hours were allotted me for the Composure, will dispence with it Read, as well as Heard, although it be no Polite and Elaborate Discourse; and for others, that are less Candid, I am not Solicitous.*

Plain and useful are the Characters I affect, if it may be any ways Instrumental to promote the good estate of their Souls

who peruſe it, and ſerve to expreſs a real Gratitude for Your Favours, it will fully anſwer my Deſign; who daily pray for your Temporal and Spiritual Wellfare in this World, and Your Eternal Happineſs in the next; and am,

SIR,

Your Obliged,

Faithful Servant,

Lewis Atterbury.

PSAL. XC. 12.

So teach us to number our Days, that we may apply our Hearts unto Wiſdom.

THIS *Pſalm* is a Prayer of *Moſes*, who, taking occaſion from the preſent Calamities and Miſeries, with which the Children of *Iſrael* were afflicted in the Wilderneſs; pens theſe Reflections on the ſhortneſs, the uncertainty, and Miſeries of Humane Life, for the uſe of the preſent and ſucceeding Generations: And, having inſiſted wholly upon this Theme in the firſt eleven verſes, he concludes with what influence theſe Conſiderations ought to have upon our Lives and Converſations. *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto Wiſdom.*

In which words I ſhall conſider,

1. What is meant by numbring our days.

2. What by applying our hearts unto Wiſdom.

1. By numbring our days, is not meant any curious or ſollicitous enquiry into the determinate number of the days of our Life; for this would be not only uſeleſs, but impoſſible to be diſcover'd by the glimmering Light of Humane Reaſon; 'tis only known to Omniſcience, and a Secret lock'd up in the Archives of Heaven.

Prudens futuri temporis exitum
Caliginoſâ nocte premit Deus.

Says the Poet. God out of kindneſs hides from us future Events, leſt they ſhould ſour the preſent enjoyments of Life. But the numbring our days, denotes ſuch a ſober and ſerious conſideration of the ſhortneſs and uncertainty

certainty of our Lives, and the ends for which God has beſtow'd the precious Talent of our Time upon us, that hereby we may be induc'd to make a right uſe of it. And thus 'tis frequently us'd in Scripture.

2. By Wiſdom is meant the applying our Minds to the true Fear of God, or the leading a Vertuous and Religious Life. For, as the *Greeks* and *Romans* call'd the Knowledge of Secret and Excellent things by the name of Philoſphy: ſo the *Jews* call'd it by the name of * *Cochmah* חכמה or wiſdom, which oftentimes occurs in *Solomon*'s Works; and thus 'tis uſed by the Primitive Fathers. So that the plain meaning of the Words, is this.

* δοξάζω Ἰησοῦν χριστὸν τὸν θεὸν οὕτως ὑμᾶς Σοφίσαντα —Ignat. ad Smyrn. 2 *Cor.* 2. 6, 7.

Λόγον σοφίας οὐ τὴν εὐγλωττίαν, &c. *Sermonem ſapientiæ vocat non eloquentiam ſed veram doctrinam cujus ipſe etiam divinus Apoſtolus gratiam acceperat, & divus Johannes Evangeliſta, &c.* Theodoret in 2 ep. ad Corinth. cap. 12.

O Lord, ſo teach us to conſider the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of our Lives, that by living Vertuouſly and Religiouſly, we may wiſely provide for the eternal welfare of our Souls. *So teach us to number our days,* &c.

In which words are imply'd,

1. The ſhortneſs and uncertainty of our Lives. Our Lives are meaſured by days.

2. Our unwillingneſs to number them. We muſt be taught it.

3. How we ought to number them. So teach us to number, *&c.*

4. What effect a right numbring them would have upon our Lives and Converſations. It would incline our Hearts to true Wiſdom.

1. The ſhortneſs and uncertainty of our Lives, which are meaſured out to us by Days, not Months and Years; teaching us, that we are only aſſured of the τὸ νὺν the time preſent, and know not but the next moment our Souls may be required of us. We are truly one of thoſe Creatures *Pliny* tells us of, call'd ἐφήμεροι, Creatures of a Day; for tho' our lives may be length-

Luke 12.

lengthen'd out to many Months and Years, yet we are expoſed to ſo many Diſeaſes, ſuch variety of Accidents and Misfortunes, that we have reaſon to look upon every Day as our laſt. Let a Man but contemplate the curious Frame and Compoſition of his Body; how many Springs and Wheels go to the making up this wonderful Machine: Let him but conſider the infinite number of Bones, Veins, Arteries, and Fibres, the different Situations, Intentions, and Qualifications of each, together with their continual and unaccountable Fermentations; and that, if but one Pin in this miraculous Movement is out of order, it threatens the *Diſſolution* of the whole; and he will ſoon find, how little reaſon he has to flatter himſelf with the hopes of long Life, from Youth and a Vigorous Conſtitution; that his life hangs by a ſlender Thread, and his Preſervation is as great a Miracle as his firſt Formation. The ſtory of *Damocles* is the Caſe of every one of us. Whilſt we indulge our ſelves in the Enjoyments and Pleaſures of this World, and pleaſe our ſelves with the Hopes of many Happy Years to come: Death holds his Shaft over our Heads, *Pſal.* 139. 14.

and

and perhaps the next moment ſtrikes us through.

'Twould be too trite a Theme, to particulariſe the many Diſeaſes and Accidents Mankind is ſubject to, our daily Experience will ſuggeſt ſuch Conſiderations as theſe to us, and therefore I ſhall not inſiſt upon them; but cloſe up all with the *Apothegme* of a *Jewiſh Rabbi. Suppoſe* (ſays he) *you were forewarn'd of ſeven Men, that one of them ſhould kill you, would not you put your ſelf upon your Guard at the approach of any one of them*: In like manner, when we are aſſur'd that one day muſt be our laſt, ought we not in common Prudence to prepare our ſelves, leſt the Preſent ſhould be ſo. And therefore we may juſtly wonder,

2. At our Averſion to meditate on the ſhortneſs of our Lives, that we have need to be taught this plain Leſſon, *So teach us to number our Days, &c.* But alas! we are ſo taken up with the Pleaſures and Enjoyments of this World, our Faculties are ſo earneſtly arreſted with the Objects of Senſe, that 'tis very irkſome

ſome to us, to think of parting with ſuch dear Friends, and old Acquaintance. We ſay with the Apoſtles in the Mount; *'tis good to be here*; and hanker after the Leeks and Onions of *Egypt*, even when we are on the Confines of the Heavenly *Canaan*. We are indeed very exact in computing our Bags of Money and Acres of Land, our Sheep and Oxen are told, our Accounts ballanc'd, and even the Sands of the Sea eſcape not our Arithmetick; but, as if the days of our Life had no relation to us, we ſeldom trouble our heads to number them, or elſe perverſely multiply thoſe few Units to an Eternity. For tho' we daily ſee many of our Friends and Acquaintance ſnatch'd away from us in their Youth and the flower of their Age; yet theſe we take little notice of; but, if one amongſt an hundred lives to threeſcore years and ten, this is continually in our thoughts, and we queſtion not, but our Lives will bear the ſame Date with his; nay in extream Age, we flatter our ſelves with the hopes of many Years to come, and are never ſo old but we expect to live a Year longer. *Alexander* the Great, puft up with his ſucceſs in Arms, declares himſelf the

Son

Son of a God, tho' his immature death at 32 Years of Age prov'd him mortal. And the *Roman* Captains dazled with the ſplendour of their Triumphs, found they had need of a *Memento te mortalem eſſe*, remember that thou art mortal. And therefore we have great Reaſon, by a frequent Meditation on Death and Eternity, to looſen our Souls from ſenſual Objects, to ſhake off theſe Houſes of Clay, and call to mind that this World is not our Home, that we are of a more Divine Original, free Denizens of the Heavenly *Jeruſalem.* And therefore I come to ſhew,

3. How we ought to number our days.

1. Number only the Time preſent. Do not promiſe thy ſelf many Months and Years of Health and Proſperity, ſince every moment thou enjoyeſt, is the unmerited Largeſs of Heaven. That vital fire which informs thy unactive Clay burns no longer than 'tis ſuſtain'd by the Breath of the Lord which at firſt kindled it; and therefore do not cheat thy ſelf, (as the generality of Mankind doth) and fancy thou haſt many years in ſtore ſince

ſince the time to come is no more thine than that which is paſt, and thou mayſt as well call back Yeſterday, as aſſure thy ſelf of to Morrow. To call that time thy own which is ſo little in thy power, would be to Act over the folly of the mad *Athenian*, who ſtanding upon the Key at *Athens*, took account of all the Ships that entered in, and their burthen, and fancy'd them his own. 'Twould be time miſpent to inculcate this plain and ſelf-evident Truth, did not our Experience teach us, that though 'tis univerſally believ'd, 'tis ſeldom thought on; for upon what account do men defer the Reformation of their Lives? why do they put off this important (and as they themſelves confeſs) abſolutely neceſſary work? but that they expect their days ſhould be extended to the utmoſt limits of Humane Life, and they drop ripe into their Graves.

2. Appoint ſet times for numbring your days. For ſo bewitching are the Temptations and Allurements of the world, that unleſs we frequently meditate on this Sub-

ject, we ſhall be apt to place our Affections on things below; to take up on this ſide *Jordan*, and forget our Heavenly *Canaan*. We are Creatures of ſenſe, buſied about thoſe Objects which at preſent offer themſelves to us, and are very hardly perſwaded our Condition ſhall be altered. We promiſe our ſelves a long and uninterrupted ſucceſſion of Proſperity, the Enjoyment of our Goods for many years, when we know not but this Night our Souls may be required of us; and therefore the Advice of a Heathen Moraliſt, would certainly much more become a Chriſtian, That we ſhould examine out ſelves every night before we compoſe our ſelves to ſleep, πῶ παρέβλω, τί δ' ἔρεξα, &c. What Progreſs have I made in my Chriſtian Courſe? What Good have I done this day? What Sins have I committed? What ought I to have done which I have omitted? This would have the ſame Effect with keeping an exact Account of our Temporal Incoms and Expence; of which 'tis obſerv'd, that hardly any man that performs it carefully, runs out of his Eſtate by his own

own Profuſeneſs. This would keep our Conſciences tender, and ſtifle the firſt riſings of Sin in our Hearts: 'twould cruſh the Cockatrice in the Egg, and extinguiſh the Sparks of Luſt, before they are fann'd into the flame of habitual ſins.

3. Number the days you have loſt. Conſider with your ſelf *quam minima pars vitæ eſt quam vivimus*, how little of our time we ſpend in thoſe Actions which are ſuitable to the Dignity of our Natures, and tend to promote our true, that is, our Eternal Intereſt. For to omit that Infancy is the Life of a Plant, that Child-hood and Youth are Vanity, compute the time we ſpend *inter pectina & calicem*, then add what we laviſh in eating, drinking, and ſleeping; what ill husbands ſhall we find our ſelves of that little which remains? the greateſt part is taken up in purſuing the Criminal Pleaſures of the World, the Luſts of the Fleſh, the Luſts of the Eye, and the Pride of Life: Whereas the worſhip of our Creator, the making our calling and Election ſure, the preparation for Death, are

Infinita eſt velocitas temporis quæ magis apparet reſpicientibus, Sen. ep. 59.

often wholly neglected; and generally but the Imployment of ſome leiſure Hours: The beſt of us are too frequently allur'd by the Follies and Vanities of the World, we loſe many precious ſeaſons of Grace, and grieve and reſiſt God's Holy Spirit. And therefore let theſe Conſiderations make us more careful for the future, let it ſuffice that for the time paſt we have been ſeduc'd by the ſollicitations of the Devil, and our own corrupt Natures; from henceforth let us preſs forward, redeeming the time, knowing that it is now high time to awake out of ſleep: The night is far ſpent, the day is at hand, let us therefore caſt off the works of darkneſs, and let us put on the Armour of Light.

4. Number your days in order to Eternity: Conſider, that upon a due managing this ſmall Portion of Time allotted us in this World, the Eternal welfare of our Bodies and Souls doth depend. That this World is, as it were, the great Laboratory for the preparing us for the next, and that if we are not perfected here, we ceaſe to be ſo for ever; Death comes, and ſhuts the Door,

Ex hoc momento pendet Æternitas.

Door, and deprives us of the hopes of all future happineſs: If with the Fooliſh Virgins we ſlumber, and neglect to trim our Lamps with the Oil of Grace and Good Works, till the Bridegroom comes, there will be no borrowing then when we have need of it, we ſhall be for ever excluded from the Marriage-Feaſt: for as the Tree falls ſo it lies, and according as our management of thoſe Talents God has here entruſted us with has been, ſuch will our condition be to all Eternity hereafter. O Eternity, Eternity! who can without concernment contemplate this endleſs State of Bliſs or Miſery? who can think on it without Horrour and amazement? 'Tis a Stream which always flows, a Duration which never ceaſes; which muſt needs be above our Comprehenſion, ſince 'tis more boundleſs than thought it ſelf. Did but the Sinner ſeriouſly meditate on it, could he but once be capable of ſuch a ſerious thought, 'twould make his Knees ſmite together, and every Joint tremble. The Drunkard would let fall his Cup, and the boiling blood of the Laſcivious perſon, would chill and freeze at this conſideration; that after he has endured

dured Hell Torments more Ages than there are hairs on his Head, or Sands on the Sea ſhore, or than Arithmetick can number; he ſhall be no nearer an end of his Miſery, than when he firſt entred into them. Be wiſe then in time, and weigh it well, which are to be preferr'd; the Pleaſures of ſin, which are but for a Seaſon, or thoſe at God's Right-Hand for evermore: which is eaſieſt to be born, the momentary Sufferings of this preſent Life; or the fiery Vengeance of an angry God to all Eternity. And that theſe Conſiderations may make the more laſting Impreſſions on your minds,

5. Implore the Aſſiſtance of God's Grace, that he would teach you ſo *to number your days, &c.* For without this, all our endeavours will prove unſucceſsful, the Temptations of the Devil will be too hard for us, and we ſhall be born down by the ſtream of our corrupt Inclinations. 'Twill be impoſſible for us long to maintain a violent Motion, that runs counter to our Paſſions and Appetites, without a ſpiritual Principle inſpir'd into us from above; it muſt be this

Spring

Spring which ſets all the Faculties of our Souls on working, and enables us to ſurmount thoſe Difficulties which otherwiſe would be inſuperable; 'tis the Grace of God alone which triumphs over Nature, and will in the end Crown us with a Wreath of Victory, if accompanied with our honeſt Endeavours. Of this we have a plain inſtance in the Philoſophers, who were Men of moſt excellent Tempers, furniſhed with the moſt admired Precepts of Moral Philoſophy, and yet none of them could live up to their own Rules; but by their Practice utterly confuted their Speculation. They did indeed number their Days, their Diſcourſes were full of pompous Expreſſions of the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of Life, the contempt of Death, and Vanity of worldly things; but their Meditations did not direct them to apply their Hearts unto Wiſdom. For neither *Cato* nor *Brutus* (who were repreſented as the conſummate Exemplars of Wiſdom; Men, who had realiz'd the ſublime Idea of Vertue deſcribed in their Writings) were able to make a fair *Exit* from the Stage of Life. So inſufficient are the beſt Precepts of meer Natural Reaſon (like

(like Torrents that are dryed up in the heat of Summer, when there is moſt needof them) they fail in extremity, becauſe not deriv'd from the Fountain of Life.

6. Frequently viſit the Houſes of Mourning, behold your expiring Friends and Relations when they are on Beds of languiſhing and leaving the World, when all Prejudice and Paſſion leaves them, when the Soul retires within it ſelf, beholds all Objects in their proper Colours, and every thing in its true Light: Then liſten what Counſel and Advice they'll give you. Will they bid you purſue the *Syren* Charms of deluding Pleaſure? or court the Aery Applauſe of the giddy Multitude? or burthen your ſelf with thick Clay? No, all theſe they'll, tell you are vain and uſeleſs, nothing yields them any real ſatisfaction, but the remembrance of a well ſpent life, a good Conſcience, ſaving Grace, and the knowledge of Jeſus Chriſt. I come to ſhew,

4. And laſtly, what Effect a right numbring our days would have upon our Lives and

and Converſations. It will teach us to apply our Hearts unto true ſpiritual wiſdom, which conſiſts in theſe four things,

1. In keeping us from all wilful and preſumptuous ſins.

2. In a careful improvement of Time.

3. In taking off our Affections from worldly things.

4. In a due preparation for Death, and comfortable Hopes of Happineſs hereafter.

1. The frequent Meditation on the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of our Days, will keep us from wilful and preſumptuous ſins. 'Tis the good advice of the Son of *Sirach*. Remember thy end, and let Enmity ceaſe, remember Corruption and Death, and abide in the Commandement; for, he that conſiders that he walks upon the brink of Eternity, will be very careful how to direct his ſteps; he dares not affront the great Judge

of the world, by a wilful violation of his Laws; nor with the Rich man in the Goſpel, ſing a *Requiem* to his Soul, becauſe he knows not but this night it may be required of him; with St. *Jerom*, he fancies the laſt Trump continually ſounding in his ears, ariſe ye dead, and come to Judgment: And when tempted to the commiſſion of any ſin, reaſons thus with himſelf. Would I do this thing, if this day were to be my laſt? and how know I, but my Soul may expire the next moment, ſince this very moment, many thouſands are breathing out their laſt? And therefore the *Indian Brachmans* had their Sepulchres before their Doors, that, both at their going out and coming in, they might remember their approaching Death, as a curb to reſtrain them from all ſinful pleaſures, and immoderate deſires of worldly enjoyments.

2. It would make us careful to improve every moment of our time, conſidering how great the Task is we are to perform in thoſe few moments which are allotted us. For believe me (Friends) the buſineſs of our ſalvation is a work of difficulty, and requires our

our utmoſt Care and Diligence. The ſubduing our Corruptions, the denying of our ſelves, and breaking off thoſe Vicious Habits, which have got the poſſeſſion of our Souls, and the introducing the contrary Graces of Faith, Vertue, Knowledge, Temperance, Patience, Godlineſs, Brotherly kindneſs, and Charity. This is not to be performed without Pains and Induſtry; and therefore we are commanded in the Holy Scripture, *to work out our Salvation with fear and trembling, to ſtrive to enter into the ſtrait gate, and to give all diligence to make our Calling and Election ſure.*

Now he that is heartily convinc'd of this, will hardly think it Prudence to trifle away any part of that time, upon which an Eternity depends; the length of his Journey will make him mend his pace, and improve to to the uttermoſt, thoſe few Sands which are left in his Glaſs. He that underſtands wiſely, how to number his days, will think his whole Life little enough to ſecure the great concern of his Soul, and himſelf ſufficiently rewarded, if after many Faſtings and Watchings, many Prayers and Tears, many acts of Mortifica-

tion and ſelf-denyal, many toilſom Conflicts with the Devil, and his own deprav'd Nature, he at laſt obtains a comfortable hope of Happineſs in the Life to come.

3 It will take our Affections off from worldly things, by ſhewing us how vain and tranſitory they muſt needs be, ſince even our Lives, upon which theſe depend, are ſo uncertain and precarious; if they do not make themſelves wings, and fly away, yet we muſt leave them, and be taken from all thoſe gilded Trifles, which, like the Apples of *Sodom*, gratifie our Senſes for a little while, but then crumble to Duſt, and leave an ungrateful ſmell behind them.

For wouldeſt thou purchaſe to thy ſelf a Monopoly of all the Wealth in the world, wert thou able to empty the *Weſtern* Parts of Gold, and the *Eaſt* of all her Spices, ſhouldſt thou encloſe to thy ſelf the whole Earth from one end of Heaven to another, and fill this wide world's circumference with Golden heaps and hoards of Pearl: Didſt thou in the mean time ſit at the Stern; and

Πάντα παντα-χοῦ θνητα ἐν ἁλωτα. Ar. in Ep.

and hold the Reins in thine hand of all Earthly Kingdoms; nay, exalt thy ſelf as the Eagle, and ſet thy Neſt among the Stars; or, like the Sun of the morning, advance thy Throne, even above the Stars of God; yet all this would be of no uſe to thee under the preſſures and accuſations of an awaken'd Conſcience, or on a dying bed; in vain wilt thou then ſeek for a portion of Scripture to ſuſtain thy Soul, or call for a drop of that living water to quench thy thirſt. The Pomp and Splendour, all the wealth of this world, can give no relief in a day of wrath, (*Prov.* 11. 4.) they will all vaniſh as the morning dew, or, like broken Reeds, pierce thy hands, when thou leaneſt upon them.

4. And laſtly, to prepare our ſelves for Death, and lay good grounds for comfortable hopes of Happineſs hereafter; by frequently making up our accounts with God, we ſhall attain to ſuch an holy truſt and confidence in his Mercy, as not to be affrighted with thoſe terrors, which Death the King of them uſually brings along with him. For the

the Apoſtle tells us, *that the ſting of Death is ſin*; that is, 'tis the remembrance of paſt ſins unrepented of, and neglect of this duty of numbring their days, which fills, even the Souls of Good Men, with fear and diſtraction at the time of their departure out of this life: The Devil then is very buſie, and repreſents to their Conſciences all the paſt miſcarriages of their Lives; he injects dire and black thoughts into their Minds, and frequently drives them even to the gates of deſpair. Now he, that is well practis'd in this holy Art of numbring his days, and hath liv'd in continual expectation of his approaching end, has nothing to do, but, with old *Simeon*, to ſing his *nunc dimittis*; *Lord now letteſt thou thy Servant depart in peace.* Death is to him a welcome Meſſenger, which brings him a *quietus eſto.* A reſt from all pains, labours and Afflictions. He meets it with the ſame ſerenity of mind, that one meets a familiar Acquaintance; and lies down in his Grave with as little concern, as he us'd to lye down in his Bed, *Iſa.* 57. 2. So much reaſon had that wicked Prophet *Balaam* for his wiſh: *O let me dy the death of the Righteous, and let my latter end*

end be like his! What remains therefore, but that, from a frequent and ſerious conſideration of the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of our time here, we be all of us prevailed upon to apply our Hearts unto true ſpiritual wiſdom; that ſo, when our Souls ſhall leave theſe Houſes of Clay; *and our mortal put on immortality*, we may be receiv'd into thoſe Heavenly Aboads, *where the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, enjoy perpetual reſt and felicity, by an uninterrupted Communion with God in Glory*; which we have good reaſon to hope, is the happy Condition of this Honourable Perſon, whoſe Funerals we here ſolemnize.

It would be eaſie here to expatiate in a Panegyrick on her Birth and Parentage, and thoſe other Endowments with which Nature and Education had bleſs'd her; but this ſuits better with the *Forum* than the Pulpit, and they are all ſo well known to moſt here, that it would be of no uſe at preſent.

I ſhall only give you an account of thoſe paſſages in her laſt ſickneſs, of which I my ſelf was a witneſs: In which, after ſhe had ſtruggl'd with the tedious Infirmities of a lingring Diſeaſe, with an invincible Mind; ſhe exchang'd this Life for a better; like a devout

vout Christian and a sound Member of the Church of *England*. For, when she found her strength decay, and that she was going to her long home, she earnestly requested the *Viaticum* of the Holy Sacrament; and frequently desired the Prayers of the Church; she solemnly declared her lively Faith in God, her serious Repentance for the past Errors of her Life, and her unfeigned Love and Charity towards all the World; and, having receiv'd the Absolution of the Church, she past the rest of her time in pious and holy Ejaculations; and at last devoutly breath'd out her Soul, in the words of the Holy *Stephen*, *Lord Jesus receive my Spirit.* Amen.

FINIS.

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